saalt south asian americans leading together

8403 Colesville Road, Suite 1100
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Phone: 301.270.1855
Fax: 301.270.1882
info@saalt.org
www.saalt.org

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Good Afternoon everyone, I am Lakshmi Sridaran and I serve as the Executive Director of South Asian Americans Leading Together or SAALT. As a pan South Asian organization, we are honored to work alongside and learn from the International Commission for Dalit Rights (ICDR) and members of the National Coalition of Caste Discrimination in the USA and other civil rights organizations. We are also thrilled to be part of this historic day which symbolizes an acknowledgement of caste oppression, which we know has very real consequences of discrimination, abuse, and dehumanization here in the Diaspora in the areas of employment, housing, immigration, and education just to name a few.

While SAALT originally catalyzed its mission around civil rights and immigrant justice in response to the surge in hate violence targeting South Asian American communities, largely those racialized as Muslim, following 9/11, we have more recently understood that we cannot do this work adequately or justly without adding a transnational lens to our work. Our partners in the National Coalition of South Asian Organizations, which include Equality Labs and ICDR, both of whom are here today, have pushed our necessary learning and political education around this, and at times challenged us to consider the harm we may be engaging in by not addressing caste. As such, we have been adding a caste analysis to our work since 2018 to both internally examine this around staff and board leadership within the organization and externally to inform and deepen our work on hate violence and immigration, most notably migrant detention.

This began with an internal training on caste supremacy for SAALT staff led by Equality Labs in 2018, bookended by trainings for two cohorts of our community development and youth leadership programs that same year. In 2019, we were proud to partner with Equality Labs on the first ever Congressional Briefing on Caste in the Diaspora where Equality Labs discussed findings from their groundbreaking report and organized testimonies from American Dalit community members. And just last year, ICDR leadership provided a powerful training on caste for the 50 members of our National Coalition of South Asian Organizations or NCSO. And this year, we have begun work with another NCSO partner to create a South Asian country conditions report that will focus on push factors for forced migration, a significant one being caste oppression, which we hope will improve the currently grim asylum prospects for so many South Asian migrants.

With even more Dalit-led organizations now part of the NCSO, we are eager to continue this intentional learning and meaningfully integrate caste into all issues of South Asian American policy and advocacy. We believe that without doing so, we are inadequately representing the

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interests of our communities. We look forward to hearing from today's expert panel on the legal underpinnings for the lived experiences of what we know to be true, and following up

with each of the agency's represented here today to continue the important work of legally recognizing caste discrimination.

Thank you,

Lakshmi Sridaran